

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ARTICLE III

INTERIM CHARGE 1:

Monitor the agencies and programs under Article III and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation and riders passed by the 86th Legislature.

The following constitute responses to a request for information regarding the above interim charge posted on August 5, 2020.



September 30, 2020

The Honorable Greg Bonnen
Texas House of Representatives
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

Dear Chairman Bonnen:

As the presidents of a small group of unique regional institutions, we want to highlight the importance of essential funding that enables us to better meet the growing higher education needs of our communities and the state – expansion funding. Previously known as transition funding and downward expansion funding, last session, the legislature renamed this funding, unexpectedly cut the amount, and included rider language to accelerate the original plan to phase out this funding. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused financial hardships for our institutions that have put the education and workforce training we provide in jeopardy.

Because we are also subject to the 5% budget reduction, we seek to **safeguard expansion funding. We request that these items be treated similarly to other non-formula support items by eliminating the additional 25% reduction** in the base appropriations bill and deleting the corresponding rider.

Our institutions serve higher education needs for our regions while also helping to drive the local economy. With the pandemic causing historic unemployment levels and disproportionately impacting minority communities, the very communities we serve, our institutions have an even more critical role in up-skilling and retraining workers to meet the needs of the recovering Texas economy. Our success is vital to first-generation students, economic recovery, and long-term resiliency of our communities and regions.

Like neighboring community colleges exempted from recently mandated budget reductions, our institutions serve a more significant proportion of those defined "at-risk." At-risk students tend to be first-generation, economically disadvantaged, and require equitable support to be college-ready, such as student support programs and services outside of the classroom to increase the propensity to succeed. Further funding reductions to universities already facing unexpected costs and revenue losses threaten our ability to deliver essential student support services equitably.

State funding is essential for our institutions to continue to meet the needs of our communities. Historically, our formula funding per student was higher, making a phase-out of these expansion funds more realistic as institutions could reasonably expect to grow. Without reliable formula funding growth, our institutions heavily depend on these funds for core support to academic programs and student services. Therefore, any reductions in non-formula support funding will force our institutions to eliminate critical programs and services, and likely reduce effectiveness in helping students succeed and graduate ready to enter the workforce.

The 87th legislative session will be daunting, and our state faces many trying issues. However, our institutions face a compounding impact of a statewide budget reduction of 5% plus this potential 25% reduction to expansion funding in the base appropriations bill that will disproportionately impact students. Applying these additional reductions would harm our institutions while producing very minimal savings to the state.

Thank you for your consideration of this mission-critical funding.

Sincerely,



Bob Mong
President
University of North Texas at Dallas



Marc A. Nigliazzo
President
Texas A&M University – Central Texas



Cynthia Teniente-Matson
President
Texas A&M University – San Antonio



Emily F. Cutrer
President
Texas A&M University – Texarkana



Ira K. Blake
President
University of Houston – Clear Lake



Robert K. Glenn
President
University of Houston - Victoria



Response to the House Appropriations Committee
Article III Sub-Committee's Formal Request for
Information on Interim Charge 1 and 2

September 30, 2020

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) offers the following input to the House Appropriations Committee's Article III Subcommittee regarding Interim Charges 1 and 2, which call for monitoring agencies and programs covered by the state's public education budget, overseeing implementation of related legislation, and evaluating the ongoing costs associated with implementing House Bill (HB) 3 passed in 2019.

As a leading advocate for public education and the largest educator association in Texas, ATPE is grateful that much of the state's critical public education spending has been exempted from the call for interim spending cuts during the 2021 fiscal year (the 2020-21 school year). We also appreciate the numerous statements from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle assuring school board members, parents, and educators that education funding will be maintained at current levels in the upcoming budget. These assurances are particularly meaningful considering the anticipated fiscal pressure facing lawmakers as they draft the next state budget. Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar has already predicted Texas will end the current budget cycle with a \$4.6 billion deficit, and state revenues may still be depressed at the onset of the next fiscal cycle, adding to that total.

ATPE supports a public education funding system that is equitable and adequate to provide every student an equal opportunity to receive an exemplary public education. In its passage of HB 3 last year, the Legislature took substantial steps toward meeting that same goal. **ATPE urges the 87th Legislature to use every tool at its command, including using up 100% of the state's Economic Stabilization Fund (commonly called the "Rainy Day Fund") to maintain the progress made toward adequately and equitably funding public education.** However, ATPE understands the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to make difficult decisions, and this committee may be forced to trim the next budget if the economic downturn persists well into 2021.

ATPE has long believed that when budget cuts are necessary, the goal should be to minimize the negative impacts on vulnerable populations, such as at-risk or economically disadvantaged students. This means protecting state-funded programs that directly benefit students. The largest of these programs is the Foundation School Program (FSP). However, there are smaller programs such as Communities in Schools (CIS), which provides mental health services and runs dropout prevention efforts, and the Windham School District, which serves incarcerated youth, that are funded outside the FSP. By making strategic cuts to programs that primarily impact adults or serve less critical needs, the state could reduce harm to students, particularly those with higher needs.

There are other programs such as the alternative certification program Teach for America or physical fitness assessments, for example, that could be cut during the upcoming biennium with

fewer negative impacts to students. **Should cuts to PK–12 education spending prove necessary, three areas the Legislature should consider first are testing and accountability, charter expansion, and the continued rollout of the HB 3 merit pay program known as the Teacher Incentive Allotment.**

Testing and Accountability:

High-stakes student testing has consistently ranked among the top three concerns voiced by ATPE members. Test results can shape the direction of a student's education future and life. The outsized role of standardized tests influences how students are taught, textbooks are written, courses are designed, money is dedicated, and time is spent.

Although much standardized testing in Texas is mandated by the federal government through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it is worth noting Texas requires more testing and attaches more high stakes to its testing than necessary to meet the demands of federal law. Federal law requires testing in reading/language arts and mathematics for all students in grades 3-8 and once in high school, as well as in science at least once in each of grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. Texas can and is scheduled next year to eliminate the stand-alone fourth and seventh grade writing tests; our state also could eliminate the eighth grade social studies and high school U.S. history tests. The state could also specify that any student taking a PSAT, PreACT, SAT, or ACT exam in high school may use that test to satisfy the federal requirements and be exempted from taking a STAAR exam. For students taking the PreACT and ACT, that change would eliminate all state testing at the secondary level. Students taking the PSAT and SAT would still need to take a science test in 10th, 11th or 12th grade, unless they took a science AP placement exam as a substitute. For the 2020-21 school year only, the state could also eliminate the science exam by moving it from eighth to ninth grade. Other savings measures could include a reduction in retesting, use of a previous year's test to cut costs on test item development, and relaxing test security and test administration training that are expensive for districts.

COVID-19 demands that testing and accountability be examined through a new lens, at least for the near-term future. When the pandemic forced schools to close their doors and move students to a remote learning environment in spring 2020, it was immediately clear it would be impossible for states to carry out standardized testing requirements. The U.S. Department of Education prudently waived federal testing and accountability requirements for the 2019-20 school year. Under orders from Gov. Greg Abbott, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) were not administered, and Texas schools were officially "Not Rated: Declared State of Disaster" for the 2019-20 school year.

In July 2020, the ATPE House of Delegates adopted a resolution to "urge the State of Texas and the U.S. Department of Education to waive requirements to administer the 2020-21 STAAR and TELPAS due to the disruption of in-person instruction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic." Not only will those tests take up too much time and attention this year—resources needed for remediation and emotional support as students deal with impact of COVID-19—but also the tests will yield flawed and incomplete data that could unfairly punish students, educators, and entire schools.

As of late September 2020, many Texas students still have not returned to physical classrooms. Teachers are struggling to teach in-person classes and provide virtual lessons for those students still at home. Many students and staff are dealing with the effects of the pandemic on the learning environment, fears of the disease, economic setbacks, and even the illness or

death of loved ones. Against this harsh backdrop is the looming obligation of STAAR testing and its attached consequences. Other states have pressed forward in advocating for a second-year waiver of the federal requirements, and Texas should follow suit.

The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic make it unreasonable to force schools to prioritize testing at a time when the state has a mounting budget deficit, and pandemic-related costs are still adding up for school districts. The state's contract with a testing vendor to provide the 2020-21 STAAR test alone is projected to cost between \$70 and \$90 million, and that does not even take into account the tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars spent annually by districts and charters to administer STAAR. **ATPE recommends the state take advantage of the opportunity for substantial savings by foregoing standardized testing this year to the extent possible and minimizing testing requirements and costs moving forward.**

Charter Expansion:

ATPE joined a coalition of education groups urging the commissioner of education to impose a moratorium on charter expansions during the pandemic this year. We wrote in our August 31 letter, "Each student who leaves a school district to enroll in a charter school costs the state, on average, \$1,150 more, because charter schools have a much higher entitlement level than most school districts in which they operate." This is in part because, unlike school districts that rely on local property taxes for a substantial portion of their funding, charter operators receive 100% of their non-federal funding directly from the state budget.

Although \$1,150 dollars may not seem like much, consider that this year alone the commissioner has authorized five new charter operators, granted expansion amendments for 49 new charter campuses, and has expansion amendments for 27 more campuses pending. Altogether, the commissioner could obligate the state to pay an additional \$66 million or more per year at a time when Texas faces a \$4.6 billion budget deficit. With many districts fearing a loss in funding that would force them to lay off staff, it is worth noting that \$66 million equates to annual wages for over 1,300 Texas teachers at an average salary of \$50,000 per year.

Under current law, the commissioner of education has the sole authority to grant charter amendments, including expansion amendments. Although the State Board of Education (SBOE) has been granted veto authority over granting charters to new operators, multiple members of the board have expressed uncertainty about the intended scope of that authority. ATPE recommends the Legislature expand the SBOE's veto authority to include oversight and approval of charter amendments and make clear that the SBOE, as the only elected body involved in the charter authorization process, has a duty to represent the voting public on matters related to charter authorization and expansion. Additionally, in light of our current fiscal crisis, **the Legislature at a minimum should place a moratorium on granting charters to new operators or approving new expansion amendments during the next biennium, and lawmakers should consider capping charter enrollment for existing charter holders at current levels until we recover from the recession.**

Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) Implementation:

HB 3 took big steps forward in improving educator compensation, which is needed to improve the prestige of the profession and attract and retain high-quality educators. The bill addressed educator compensation from three angles: increasing the Minimum Salary Schedule, tying educator compensation increases to increases in school funding via the Basic Allotment, and enacting a performance pay program, the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA). ATPE supported many aspects of HB 3, including funding to increase base compensation for educators. **We are**

recommending that the Legislature ensure funding is in place to maintain those educator salary increases under HB 3 and encourage districts to distribute any future additional funding in the form of permanent raises. We are less enthusiastic about maintaining funding for a merit pay program that has not been widely embraced by the profession and is less likely to effect long-term positive changes in educator compensation on a statewide level.

The TIA was designed to provide funds for districts to create optional performance-based pay programs at the local level. ATPE expressed reservations early on regarding three aspects of the TIA. First, we worried about the program's excessive reliance on data derived from students' standardized test results—a concern that is only magnified by COVID-19's impact on the reliability of testing data as noted above. Second, by tying substantial financial incentives for school districts and educators to teacher appraisals, the program could negatively impact the state's evaluation system, which was designed to give teachers honest feedback to help them hone their craft. Finally, we noted the TIA offers no guarantee of additional funding to any teacher who earns a merit designation because TIA funds flow to the district, not to individual educators. (Districts must use at least 90% of the TIA funds they receive on teacher compensation, but they are not required to increase the compensation of the teacher who earned the designation, and they are allowed to spend the funds on teachers who have not earned a merit designation.)

Proponents of the TIA are quick to note one of the program's main goals is incentivizing the placement of high-quality teachers in high-poverty campuses. Although ensuring at-risk students have access to high-quality teachers is a noble goal, accomplishing this goal does not require the use of a flawed system of merit designations. **ATPE supports differentiated pay programs that offer educators extra compensation for extra work or acceptance of a more challenging or high-need position, but opposes systems that sort and rank teachers primarily based on measures of student performance that are at best one-dimensional and at worst inaccurate.**

Further, the continued rollout of the TIA carries a significant cost to the Foundation School Program (FSP). The TIA program is expected to cost the agency approximately \$150 million in its first biennium, a cost that could easily jump into the billions as its rollout proceeds. The additional money Texas will spend to implement the TIA in the next budget cycle are funds that could otherwise be used to offset the unexpected costs incurred by school districts because of the pandemic. For example, just last week the Texas Education Agency posted a hiring notice for a new Director of Teacher Compensation Strategy who would help the agency implement the TIA and receive an annual salary of \$69,414.96 to \$93,405.96 plus benefits; that same amount could pay for 900 days of substitute teachers necessitated by COVID-19.

With the state likely to face significant budgetary pressures next session, and considering the controversial nature of the TIA and its many potential pitfalls, ATPE recommends the Legislature halt its implementation until state and district budgets have stabilized.

Other ATPE Recommendations:

In addition to our recommendations above, ATPE believes the Article III Subcommittee, in coordination with House leadership, could consider other potential savings in TEA agency-level spending. As the part of the public education system furthest from the students the system is

tasked to educate, TEA should operate with a light touch. Over the past several years, the agency has steadily moved beyond its role of monitoring, providing technical assistance with an eye toward best practices, and administering the distribution of FSP funding. The assumption of more authority and the management of more programmatic content has encroached upon the role of school districts and education service centers, each closer to the students they serve, and has also necessitated additional agency staff and cost. During these lean times, the Legislature should consider whether it might be better to allocate some of those dollars back to the institutions actually teaching Texas students—our public school districts.

Beyond PK-12 education funding, the Article III Subcommittee also oversees the budget for the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS). Retired and active teachers alike greatly appreciated the prudent fiscal action taken by the 86th Legislature through last year's Senate Bill (SB) 12 to increase contributions to the TRS pension fund. The increased contributions dramatically reduced the timeframe for paying down the fund's unfunded liability and immediately improved the fund's actuarial soundness. Reducing the fund's debt burden by instituting more appropriate contribution levels helps ensure the state will be able to maintain the highest possible credit rating, saving Texas taxpayers billions in interest payments over time, while maintaining the state's promise of a sound and secure retirement system for more than one million active and retired TRS members. Increased contribution rates also reduce the burden and uncertainty of paying for benefits and debt reduction by maintaining a higher rate of return on the fund's investment income, thus making the fund less susceptible over time to market downturns.

Unfortunately, it is still too early to say whether the fund will be impacted by the current economic uncertainty or a potential wave of retirements caused by COVID-19. In either event, however, higher contributions and less dependence on investment returns would put the fund in a better position to handle any crisis. **ATPE is encouraged that TRS was instructed to put the contribution increases called for in SB 12 into the agency's base budget request. We ask the Legislature to stay the course begun by the 86th Legislature and continue funding scheduled increases to the state's contribution rate for the betterment of educators and the state.**

ATPE appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback during this process and invites subcommittee members and their staff to contact ATPE Governmental Relations at (800) 777-2873 or government@atpe.org for any additional information.



**House of Representatives
Appropriations Committee – Interim Charge 1**

Interim Charge 1: Monitor and oversee the implementation of appropriations bills and other relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature

Dear Chairman Capriglione and Members of the Committee:

The membership of the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA) appreciates the tireless work of the House Appropriations committee in appropriating the necessary for funding for HB 3 during the 86th Regular Legislative Session. HB 3, and the corresponding funding, was unquestionably historic legislation, which added billions of new dollars into Texas public school budgets and the membership of TASA appreciates the Legislature's generous financial commitment. This funding is necessary for school districts to implement the many provisions and requirements of HB 3, including but not limited to, teacher pay increases, reading academies, the teacher incentive allotment, and the CCMR bonus.

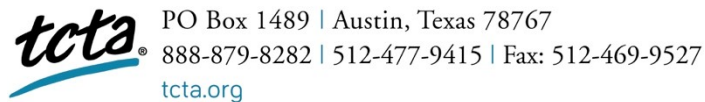
TASA urges the Legislature to continue the funding commitment of HB 3 during the 87th Regular Legislative Session and refrain from cuts that could delay or impact programs that were prioritized in HB 3. The 87th Legislative Session will be trying on many fronts and we stand ready to work with you to ensure the 5.5 million schoolchildren and the hundreds of thousands of educators across the state continue to be a priority. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Beneski", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Amy Beneski
Deputy Executive Director, Governmental Relations
Texas Association of School Administrators
406 East 11th Street
Austin, Texas 78701
(512)477-6361

Texas Classroom Teachers Association



Response to House Appropriations Committee, Art. III Subcommittee Request for Information Regarding Interim Charges 1 and 2

Submission from:
Lonnie Hollingsworth
On behalf of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association
P. O. Box 1489
Austin, TX 78767
lhollingsworth@tcta.org
512-477-9415

Interim charge 1: Monitor the agencies and programs under Article III and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation and riders passed by the 86th Legislature.

Interim charge 2: Evaluate ongoing costs associated with implementing the provisions of HB 3.

Recommendations:

Fully fund the FSP, including hold harmless funding for losses in ADA due to the pandemic. Provide an inflationary adjustment to the basic allotment. Provide an enforceable mechanism for settle-up for the compensation increases provided by HB 3. Identify ongoing costs of the Teacher Incentive Allotment and divert those funds directly into teacher compensation by a streamlined mechanism that is not governed by complex TEA rules.

HB 3 funding

HB 3 added significant additional funding to public education, but it did not fix the underlying problem with school finance. This problem is the fact that school districts have no way to increase funding per student other than to increase local property tax rates. Unless the Legislature creates some sort of adjustment to school finance formulas, such as an inflationary factor for the basic allotment, school districts will inexorably be forced to raise local tax rates to pay for inflationary costs and costs of additional programs and requirements. The result is an inevitable increase in reliance on local property taxes and a reduction in the state's share of funding over and above the reduction caused by increases in property values.

The funding of public education as amended by the provisions of HB 3 started out with significant uncertainty due to the change from previous-year to current-year funding. Districts also had

difficulty in budgeting due to significant changes in compensatory education, English Language Learning, early childhood, and outcome-based funding based on career, college, and military readiness.

The change in compensatory education funding to a system based upon the census blocks in which students live created a great deal of uncertainty. Most districts had to do their budgeting based upon high level projections of what their funding would be under the new system before any data was available. TEA initially provided census block data based on the census blocks in which schools are located, but actual census block data was not available until well into the school year. This sort of uncertainty can cause districts to significantly underestimate FSP entitlements.

This uncertainty became far worse with the onset of the pandemic. Districts were required to discontinue on-premises instruction, and the attendance accounting handbook from TEA provided no answers on how to calculate average daily attendance for remote learning other than a reference to the availability of waivers for determining attendance of students on an exceptional basis. The definition of “attend”, one of the most fundamental levers of school finance funding, is left by statute for the commissioner to determine by rule. The handbook, a rule adopted by reference, was just proposed for adoption on August 28, 2020. However, instead of adopting rules in accordance with the rulemaking process required by Texas Government Code, Chapter 2001, specifically addressing how attendance will be counted for remote instruction, the Texas Education Agency states that it will provide specific guidance on issues related to waivers for remote instruction through conditions set by the commissioner. By doing so, TEA has continued its increasing practice of adopting non-regulatory guidance to address issues, ignoring the statutory requirements for rulemaking. This sort of nonregulatory guidance circumvents the ability of the public to comment on issues of importance. It adds to the authority of the Texas Education Agency, ignoring the important checks and balances on administrative regulation provided by Chapter 2001 of the Government Code.

TEA initially provided school districts waivers from losses in average daily attendance due to the combination of a lack of regulatory framework and the lack of access to online resources by underserved populations. The pandemic focused a spotlight on the digital divide, exposing a lack of access to the vast information resources of the internet as perhaps the greatest obstacle to providing for the equitable dissemination of knowledge required by the Texas Constitution. Families with resources were able to make the pivot to online learning, while vast numbers of students became lost to their districts and teachers. Meanwhile, districts struggled to obtain the resources they needed to provide online learning.

While the hold harmless funding provided to districts experiencing a loss of ADA helped prevent a disaster, the hold harmless funding came to be largely funded by the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF) as a part of the federal CARES Act. While the CARES Act requires this funding to be distributed to districts based on their relative share of Title 1 funds

from FY 2019, TEA required districts to use this funding as a method of finance to pay for the ADA hold harmless. Accordingly, this funding was used to directly offset state general revenue that would otherwise have been expended for FSP funding for FY 2020. This saved the state about \$1 billion that would have otherwise been spent on public education. This savings should be used to fully fund HB 3 for FY 2021 and provide another hold harmless for ADA losses that continue to occur this school year.

For the upcoming biennium, districts need to be assured of a revenue stream sufficient to reinforce the infrastructure needed to accommodate changes in public education. This infrastructure includes adequate technology (devices and equipment, software, and reliable Internet access), and appropriate staffing (which may include more teachers to provide for smaller class sizes, more nurses, and access to mental health professionals).

Employee compensation provisions of HB 3

Required compensation increase

While HB 3 provides that a moderate percentage of increases in funding per ADA be used to increase non-administrator compensation in the school year after an increase is made in the basic allotment, the calculation of this required increase is almost impossible to calculate with any precision. This lack of certainty in budgeting for districts creates a downward pressure on employee compensation. Additionally, due to the lack of any ability to increase funding per ADA other than a tax rate increase, districts are reluctant to commit to ongoing compensation increases due to perceived lack of sustainability of those compensation structures.

The calculation of required compensation increases was particularly problematic the first year of implementation of HB 3. To set compensation levels before educators began to perform their duties for the school year, districts basically had to use rough estimates of increases in funding per student in average daily attendance to calculate the required salaries. If a district tried to pay only the minimum increase required by the statute, there is a distinct possibility that the district did not pay the minimum compensation increase required. Due to the requirement that school employees must exhaust local administrative remedies (generally by filing a grievance with 15 working days of the time they knew or should have known what compensation they were receiving), educators were left without any remedies for districts that did not comply with the compensation requirements of HB 3.

In its Frequently Asked Questions documents on the salary requirement, TEA states that “the statute does not differentiate between allocating funds on budgeted vs actual amounts.”ⁱ It further states, “Agency enforcement of spending requirements, when districts attempted them in good faith but when the efforts were found insufficient when accounting for actual funds, has typically involved requiring a cure in the following year.”

While HB 3 requires districts to report compensation increases to the Legislature by December 1, 2020, there is currently no effort by TEA to make sure employees received the compensation increased required by law if districts underpaid them by relying on incorrect budgeted amounts as opposed to actual expenditures. On the contrary, TEA is currently collecting information from districts to assist them with the required reporting and compensation increases and is expressly telling them to use the projections of revenues budgeted at the time they set compensation increases, which will make the data provided from TEA completely useless for the Legislature to determine whether districts complied with the salary increase provisions of HB 3.ⁱⁱ

Contrary to TEA's assertion in the FAQ document referenced, TEC Section 48.051(c) requires the increases to be made based on increases in funding and is not limited to budgeted amounts. All other spending requirements are subject to a settle-up, but the required compensation increases are not, and they should be. **TCTA recommends that TEA be required to compare actual expenditures from school districts as reflected in settle-up data so that the Legislature can determine whether districts complied with TEC Section 48.051(c). We also recommend that the statute be revised to require districts to settle up compensation increases for teachers and other covered employees prior to the end of the school year when more reliable information is available than was available when districts set their budgets.**

Teacher Incentive Allotment

TCTA recommends identifying the projected cost for the Teacher Incentive Allotment created by HB 3, delaying implementation of the teacher incentive pay program, retaining funding for the program for teacher compensation, and revising the teacher designation system used to distribute the allotment.

The costs of the Teacher Incentive Allotment lack any transparency, as there is no specific rider funding this program, and the costs appear to be buried in the discretionary funding available to the commissioner. While the Teacher Incentive Allotment is not funded as a grant program, it is also not funded through a student-based allotment as is the rest of the Foundation School Program. Rather, it is an amount per designated teacher in three categories multiplied by the number of students assigned to high needs categories based on the census block where the students live or by a rural adjustment factor. According to the authors of HB 3, the cost of the program for the current biennium is \$140 million. The basis for this cost is not itemized anywhere in the appropriations bill. It is instead included as part of the estimated projected cost for the entire Foundation School Program. The cost of the program should be specified in the appropriations bill to make it possible to evaluate whether the cost of the program warrants its continuation.

TIA is based on the premise that districts will develop local teacher designation systems that identify high-performing teachers based on student growth and teacher observation. TEA must approve these systems. TEA approval involves heavy scrutiny by TEA and Texas Tech University, and requires districts to pay a \$500 fee for each teacher submitted for designation.

TEA requires districts to show evidence of validity and reliability of student growth measures used. In evaluating this evidence, Texas Tech reviews a district's student growth data compared to state-level value-added data for student growth as measured by STAAR results. The result is an incentive pay system tied to STAAR tests, contrary to legislative intent that the system be flexible and developed at the local level and not be based on STAAR exams.

Aside from the complexity and cost of the system, TEA's requirements for the student growth measures are such that it will be difficult to apply to special education teachers, who are already in short supply and for whom additional compensation would be helpful. It also is clearly focused on STAAR-tested subjects, making it essentially a means of outcomes-based funding based on standardized tests. The result is a narrowing of the curriculum and increase in the high stakes nature of standardized tests.

With school closures in spring of 2020, student growth for 2019-20 is almost impossible to ascertain. TEA tries to address this in its rules at 19 TAC §150.1014 and §150.1014 by allowing districts to measure student growth using midyear data from 2019-20 for designations for the 2020-21 school year. Experts agree that validity and reliability of student growth data for purposes of teacher compensation depend in part on using multiple years of data. More years of data are needed to support reliable conclusions about teacher effectiveness because positive and negative errors in annual student growth can be averaged over several years, increasing the stability of the measure.ⁱⁱⁱ TEA's rules allowing partial year data to determine student growth for purposes of teacher designations for Cohort A and B create real concerns about the validity and reliability of those designations. The 2020-21 year is also unlikely to have a full year of growth data given the spikes in COVID-19 cases in Texas.

TEA just announced the first cohort, Cohort A, of school districts eligible to receive TIA funds. Only 26 districts were approved for Cohort A and only 36 districts have submitted a letter of intent for Cohort B. According to TEA, Cohort C districts would not receive funding until September 2022 or 2023.^{iv} **The Legislature could revise the teacher designation system before districts have implemented and committed to any funding under current statutes and TEA rules. TCTA recommends that it do so.**

ⁱ HB 3 in 30: Teacher Compensation, Presentation on Budget Planning for Teacher Compensation <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/HB3-Video-Series-Budget-Planning-for-Teacher-Compensation.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ https://tea.co1.qualtrics.com/CP/File.php?F=F_8CAOkpQrPRgpofr

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED563445.pdf>.

^{iv} <https://tiatexas.org/general-info-and-program-requirements/cohort-timelines-and-readiness-checklists/>



ARTICLE III

September 30, 2020

RE: APPROPRIATIONS INTERIM CHARGE 1 – MONITOR THE AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS UNDER ARTICLE III AND OVERSEE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND RIDERS PASSED BY THE 86TH LEGISLATURE

On behalf of the 65,000 members of the Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA), the following are comments in response to the House Committee on Appropriations formal Request for Information (RFI) regarding the Teacher Retirement System (TRS). TSTA is grateful for the Legislature’s attention to the TRS and its statutory commitment to growing a lasting and predictable retirement plan for our retired educators.

TEACHER RETIREMENT SYSTEM

With the passage of Senate Bill 12 (SB12), the Texas Legislature made history by committing through statute, for the first time, to a long-term and cost-effective plan to increase the financial stability of the TRS. Additionally, SB 500 marks the first time the Legislature directly paid for a “13th check” for retirees.

As a public pension, TRS depends on worker contributions, employer contributions and state contributions along with investment returns to generate the promised retirement annuity payments to our educators upon retirement. SB 12 set up a respectable contribution schedule to the pension trust fund for the state, employers and members in a phase-in schedule ending in Fiscal Year 2025. It also extended the employer contribution under Section 925.4035 to apply to all TRS-covered employers, regardless of whether the public education employer participates in Social Security.

SB 500 appropriated additional dollars to fund the state’s pension contribution increase and the one-time supplemental payment. Specifically, the bill provides \$524 million to fund the increases for the state’s contribution to the pension fund from 6.80 to 7.50 percent in fiscal years 2020 and 2021.

Collectively, last session’s legislation created a plan for the system’s unfunded liabilities. For the 2022-23 fiscal biennium, the estimated incremental increase to TRS is \$540 million in addition to the money committed during the 2020-21 fiscal biennium. Though we are in difficult financial times, TRS continues to perform highly and has already bounced back from its initial dip in March of 2020. If the state backs out of this commitment, reduces or delays its contribution plan, this would trigger a proportionate reduction in the public education employer and active employee contribution rates. Though one might

argue this as a necessary pause, it is critical to note that any delay likely increase unfunded liability and the future cost to the state, as the amount of money needed to lessen the fund's amortization period will substantially increase and potentially have devastating effects on the state's credit rating.

TRS' defined-benefit pension structure and pre-established formula provides our educators with a predictable retirement income. The average TRS retiree receives a little less than \$2,100 a month in pension payments. The benefit package that TRS offers, though modest, is a critical part of teacher retainment and a key tool for recruiting and retaining qualified individuals into the profession. With the defined monthly annuities from TRS, retirees have proven to be powerful economic engines for local communities. Previous research has shown that pension beneficiaries can, and do, bolster the economy by feeding their pension dollars back into their local communities where they live and work. In Texas, for every dollar TRS sends to members in benefits, \$2.35 in economic activity is created. With so many Texans facing unemployment and no promise of future stimulus checks, TRS pensions provide our retirees with a small but reliable source of income that is crucial to saving our local economies. Of course, TRS can only serve as a stimulus if it is able to provide our retired educators with a living wage.

Though we understand that the state is experiencing immense budgetary pressure going into the 87th legislative session, we urge budget-writers to uphold the state's commitment to fund TRS and to take the steps necessary to work towards a true cost of living adjustment in the future in lieu of periodic of one-time benefit enhancements. Our members were extremely grateful for the 13th check that they received. However, for many of them, their annuity payments from TRS are their main source of income, and they still struggle to make ends meet. After regular double-digit COLAs through the 1980s and 1990s to meet increases in the U.S. Consumer Price Index, the last significant TRS pension increase was in 2001.

In order for each and every student in Texas to have access to the dedicated and highly qualified educators they deserve, the state must maintain a sound pension plan for its more than one million active and retired TRS members. Without replacing our current pattern of infrequent and sporadic cost-of-living adjustments, our retirees' quality of life will continue to decline at an unacceptable rate. Even with the current economic climate, legislators can move forward towards a predictable retirement system by developing a statutory framework that would replace sporadic benefit enhancements of the past with a structural cost-of-living adjustment for the future. With a plan and system in place, active and retired educators, stakeholders, the community, and parents alike will have the peace of mind of knowing that public schools can attract and retain the most well-trained and dedicated employees. By staying firm to the state's contribution commitment now and developing a framework for future adjustments, you will be making the conservative and prudent decision.

TSTA respectfully submits the above comments for consideration and urges the House Committee on Appropriations to uphold the state's commitment to fund TRS and to take the steps necessary to work towards a true cost-of-living adjustment in lieu of sporadic and unpredictable benefit enhancements.

children at Risk

Response to Request for Information
Appropriations Committee
Texas House of Representatives
SUBJECT: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Interim Charge 1: Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature

New Data Available: Analysis of attendance data at State and Education Service Center levels to find patterns of chronic absenteeism; including demographics, location, grade, and other important information

Source of New Data: The Texas Education Agency generously provided Children at Risk with PEIMS data to allow for analysis of attendance patterns in specific locations and among specific sub-groups.

Date of Release of New Data: September 2020

Relevance of Chronic Absenteeism to Public Education

As defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a student is considered chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of school days within an academic year for any reason. Given a 180-day school year, that is at least 18 missed school days. Texas does not currently define chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism negatively impacts a student's ability to learn and decreases the likelihood that s/he will graduate on time, which hinders Texas's ability to meet the goals laid out in the 60x30TX strategic plan.

Students who are chronically absent in pre-k, kindergarten, or first grade are less likely to meet reading levels appropriate for third grade. Students who are not at appropriate reading levels by third grade are 4 times more likely to drop out of

Please contact:

Mandi Sheridan Kimball, Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs
mkimball@childrenatrisk.org or 512.785.7132

Jodi Moon, Director of Center for Social Measurement and Evaluation
jmoon@childrenatrisk.org
www.childrenatrisk.org

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high school.¹ A student who is chronically absent in any year between eighth and twelfth grade is 7 times more likely to drop out of school.² For high school students, lack of attendance is a better indicator of dropping out than test scores.³ Youth who drop out of school are at higher risk for poor outcomes later in life, including poverty and chronic health issues.

What does the data tell us about chronic absenteeism in Texas?

Statewide, **chronic absenteeism averages at 12.48%**, but can vary dramatically by region⁴. The San Antonio and Lubbock regions have some of the highest rates of chronic absenteeism while the Dallas and Amarillo areas have some of the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism. Similarly, different populations are more impacted than others. Pregnant students have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism (almost 70%) among their peers, suggesting that further supports are needed for these students to prevent missing school time. **Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, we see that the rates for Black and white students are both above the state average (14 and 13.5 % respectively).** The overall average rate for special education students is 17%.

¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2011). Double Jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518818.pdf>

² University of Utah, Utah Education Policy Center. (2012). Research Brief: Chronic Absenteeism. Retrieved from <https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/31291767-087c-4edb-8042-87f272507c1d>

³ The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. (2007). What Matters for Staying ON-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools: A close look at course grades, failures, and attendance in the freshman year. Retrieved from <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf>

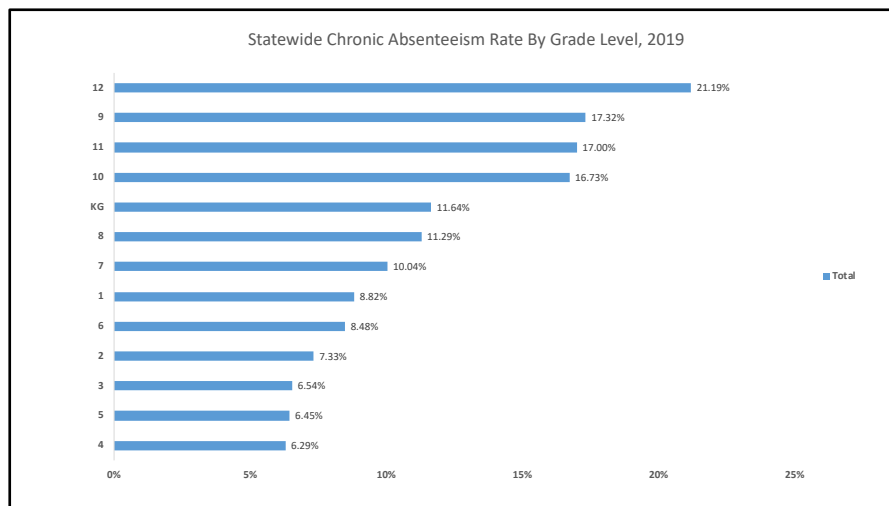
⁴ All CHILDREN AT RISK analyses uses data from Texas Education Agency, Attendance Data, 2018-19 Academic Year, The Public Education Information Management System Data, <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/data-submission/peims/peims-overview>

Please contact:

Mandi Sheridan Kimball, Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs
mkimball@childrenatrisk.org or 512.785.7132

Jodi Moon, Director of Center for Social Measurement and Evaluation
jmoon@childrenatrisk.org
www.childrenatrisk.org

children at Risk

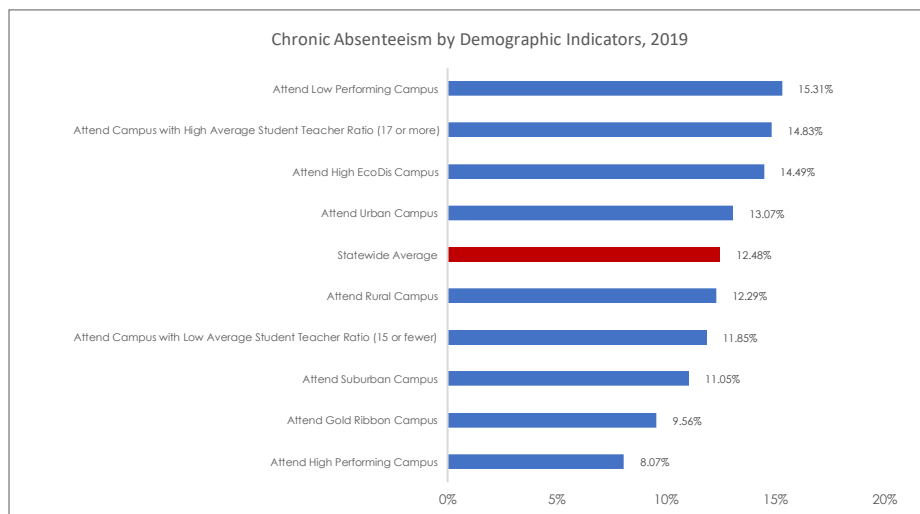


Grade level clearly plays a part: high school grades seem to be at greater risk of chronic absence.

Specifically, **12th grade has the highest rates of chronic absenteeism compared to other**

grades (21%) while 9th grade rates are about 17%.

We also consider different indicators that are associated with chronic absenteeism. Notably, attending a school with **high student teacher ratios** has on average **14.83% Chronic Absenteeism**, the second highest percentage compared to other campus indicators. This could indicate that smaller ratios/class sizes could contribute consistency in attendance through better school climate.



Please contact:

Mandi Sheridan Kimball, Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs

mkimball@childrenatrisk.org or 512.785.7132

Jodi Moon, Director of Center for Social Measurement and Evaluation

jmoon@childrenatrisk.org

www.childrenatrisk.org

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Specific Policy Recommendation #1: Define chronic absenteeism

Define chronic absenteeism in the Texas Education Code as a student who misses 10% or more of school days within an academic year for any reason (ESSA definition). This will allow monitoring and meaningful evaluation of interventions, and open the door to providing districts with funds to intervene.

Suggested Reform: Amend Section 29.081(d), Education Code to include a definition of "chronic absenteeism" to mean a student who misses 10% of instructional days.

Specific Policy Recommendation #2: Add chronic absenteeism to the "at risk" category as a duplicated count.

Define students who are chronically absent as "at risk" in the Texas Education Code as a student who is at risk of dropping out. This will ensure there is an allocation made to schools specifically on behalf of this population to support interventions on the behalf of these students.

Suggested Reform: Amend Section 29.081(d), Education Code to create an additional "at risk" category to include chronically absent students, as defined above.

Specific Policy Recommendation #3: Ensure reporting. Require that TEA report chronic absenteeism as an indicator.

Suggested Reform: Amend Section 42.006, Education Code to create an indicator for chronic absenteeism in PEIMS.

Please contact:

Mandi Sheridan Kimball, Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs

mkimball@childrenatrisk.org or 512.785.7132

Jodi Moon, Director of Center for Social Measurement and Evaluation

jmoon@childrenatrisk.org

www.childrenatrisk.org

Budget Recommendations Regarding Early Childhood Education and Student Mental Health

Input to the Texas House Appropriations Article III Subcommittee on Interim Charge 1

Texans Care for Children appreciates the opportunity to provide input on Interim Charge 1. Our comments focus on two areas within the purview of the Texas Education Agency: implementation of legislation passed by the 86th Texas Legislature related to early childhood education and student mental health.

In addition to the recommendations below regarding specific programs and priorities, we urge the Legislature to fully fund services for children and families next session. The Legislature took significant strides on school funding and mental health last year, and we are pleased to see the high level of interest among legislators in continuing and building on those efforts as the state contends with a revenue shortfall. In light of the additional challenges facing schools, teachers, children, and families during the pandemic—including the mental health toll and the disruption of learning during the critical years of early childhood—it will be more important than ever than state leaders fully fund education and other key services during the next biennium.

Early Childhood Education (Interim Charge 1a)

The Issue

Research from Texas and across the U.S. shows that effective pre-k programs help students start kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed, boost early literacy and academic achievement, and reduce both grade retention and provision of special education services. This research has demonstrated that the key elements to quality pre-k include engaging learning environments, well-trained teachers, low student-teacher ratios, a curriculum that effectively prepares children for kindergarten, full-day programs, and meaningful engagement of families in their child's education.

In 2019, state leaders made significant progress on early childhood education policy, most notably passing HB 3, a school finance bill that included landmark funding for full day pre-k for eligible 4-year olds. The full-day pre-k funding in HB 3 is provided through the new Early Education Allotment, which distributes to districts an estimated \$780 million per year for full-day pre-k or other early reading and mathematics strategies. The funding

is distributed as a 0.1 weight in the state's funding formulas for each student in kindergarten through third grade who is classified as economically disadvantaged and/ or an English Learner.

Under HB 3, districts are now required to offer full-day programs to eligible four-year-old students. Before seeking a waiver or building new classroom space to meet the requirement, districts must explore partnerships with quality child care or Head Start providers. HB 3 includes other early childhood provisions, such as:

- Requirement for pre-k programs to meet quality requirements around student progress monitoring, increased teacher training and/or qualifications, and the development of a plan to engage families in their children's education.
- Requirement for districts to provide for the use of a phonics curriculum, ensure that each K-3 classroom teacher and principal has attended a teacher literacy achievement academy, and prioritize the placement of highly effective teachers in K-2.
- Requirement for each school district to administer a kindergarten reading assessment instrument adopted by TEA, limiting the high variance in assessments previously used across the state.
- Provision directing the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to collect data on pre-k class sizes and student-teacher ratios to better assess student access to quality pre-k programs.
- Allocation of the new Dual Language Allotment based on students' enrollment in a one-way or two-way dual language program.

Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus pandemic, closures of schools and child care, as well as broader social isolation, have disrupted young children's access to effective learning opportunities education during the critical window of early childhood. A Texas Education Agency report found that this past spring, pre-k and kindergarten students—as well as children of color and low-income kids—were less engaged in distance learning.¹ During the pandemic, teachers are working harder than ever, schools are facing new costs like laptops and personal protective equipment, and lots of kids are at risk of falling behind, particularly young children and English Learners. With so much progress on the line, and the urgency greater than ever, lawmakers must ensure that the needs of young children in schools are addressed this session.

Recommendations Regarding Early Childhood Education

1. **Fully fund educational components of HB 3.** We appreciate that legislative leaders like Chairman Huberty have said that during this revenue shortfall, the Legislature won't walk away from its 2019 commitment to funding schools. Given all the challenges that schools, teachers, and children are facing

¹ Texas Education Agency (2020). *Summary of Student Engagement in Virtual Learning in School Year 2019-2020*. Retrieved at <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/covid/covid19-Student-Engagement.pdf>

right now, we know they need that funding more than ever. We look forward to working with the Legislature next session to fully fund education and to address the revenue shortfall using the Rainy Day Fund, federal relief funding for states, and other revenue options.

2. **Ensure Early Education Allotment supports children in pre-k, including young English Learners.** One of the most critical actions taken by the Legislature last session was requiring districts to offer full-day pre-k to all eligible 4-year olds. With the Early Education Allotment, districts now have access to funding that will allow them to ramp up their half-day programs to full-day and begin raising the quality of instruction. However, over 100 school districts submitted waivers for two to three years, and COVID-19 related challenges have put additional strains on school district budgets. The Committee should consider ways to ensure the Early Education Allotment continues to support the expansion to full-day pre-k and that districts have other resources to meet their needs in the older grades.
3. **Update high-quality prekindergarten standards required in HB 3 to include a maximum class size of 22 students and a student- teacher ratio of no more than 11:1.** While state law sets a limit of 22 students per class for kindergarten through fourth grade, there is no statewide standard for pre-k classes. A 2016 report commissioned by the Texas Education Agency recommended a maximum of 22 students and no more than 11 students for each teacher or aide in a classroom with more than 15 students.² While pre-k classes are temporarily lower due to COVID-19, it's an ideal time to ensure children have access to quality teacher-child interactions. That is only possible with smaller, more manageable class sizes.
4. **Protect and increase state financial support for bilingual education/ESL programs in schools through per-pupil funding.** Although many of HB 3's innovative strategies will support English Learner children and bilingual education, weighted funding for these children has not increased since the 1980s. These weights should be based on updated cost studies that account for the needs of a diverse set of students and that account for COVID-19 and other new related costs.

Student Mental Health (Interim Charges 1c, 1d, and 1f)

The Issue

Before COVID-19 threatened the social, emotional, and mental well-being of students all across the state, the Texas Legislature made the mental health of students a priority. This same leadership is needed now more than ever. The Legislature must build upon the strong progress it made last session so students can attend schools where they feel safe, connected, and supported; and where underlying trauma or mental health concerns among

² Texas Education Agency (2016). Texas Public Prekindergarten Class Size and Student-to-Teacher Ratio Study. Retrieved from: https://tea.texas.gov/Reports_and_Data/Program_Evaluations/Research_Reports/Program_Evaluation__Research_Reports/

students are met with research-based practices that help students be successful in school instead of ineffective school practices that can lead to students being pushed out of their classrooms.

The following laws passed by the 86th Texas Legislature provide a valuable framework to prevent mental health concerns from interfering with the education and well-being of students:

- *HB 18 and SB 11 Student Mental Health Provisions.* Districts are required to provide for safe and supportive school programs; they are also required to have plans, practices, or procedures related to promoting positive school climates, trauma and grief, mental health and substance use prevention and intervention, and suicide.
- *HB 19 Mental Health and Substance Use Resources for Educators.* The Legislature provided for each ESC to have an onsite Non-Physician Mental Health Professionals (NPMHP) who is employed by a local mental health authority who is responsible for increasing awareness and understanding among districts and educators of student mental health and the availability of mental health and substance use services. NPMHPs have clinical mental health backgrounds and focus on helping educators be able to recognize potential mental health, trauma, or substance abuse concerns among students and help connect families to mental health related services when needed.
- *School Safety Allotment Funds.* School districts are able to use the SB 11 School Safety Allotment to support mental health programs and strategies, along with strategies that support multi-hazard emergency plans and the physical security of school facilities. Information is not collected/reported on the number of districts choosing to use School Safety Allotment funds to support mental health strategies. Since the level of funding for the per-student allotment is dependent upon a discretionary legislative appropriation, it is likely difficult for many districts—especially smaller districts with fewer students—to add mental supports like hiring additional school counselors or social workers without any assurances of sustainable funding each biennium.

Recommendations Regarding Student Mental Health

1. **Leverage existing and future federal COVID-19 relief funds to support student mental health and supportive school climate strategies.** The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act includes funding to address the impact of COVID-19 on k-12 education, including providing mental health services and social emotional support. Schoolwide approaches that support student mental health and positive school climates benefit all students, and they are particularly effective in improving educational outcomes among academically disadvantaged groups (students in low-income households, students with disabilities, English learners, students of color, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care). The Legislature should explore ways to maximize both existing and any future federal funding that becomes available to help advance efforts to address student mental health and supportive school climates.

2. **Provide TEA with funding to dedicate additional staff to coordinate and administer agency activities related to student mental health.** While the budget passed by the House included funding for 6 FTEs dedicated to assist districts in implementing school practices related to positive school climates, student mental health, and trauma informed practices, the funding was removed in the budget conference committee.

TEA received no funds to support the implementations of school mental health legislation enacted in 2019. This has left the agency with just 1.0 permanent FTE responsible for carrying out agency activities related to mental health, trauma-informed practices, substance abuse prevention and intervention, and suicide prevention. This is woefully inadequate. Fortunately, TEA is using federal discretionary grant funds to provide an additional 1.5 FTE to support agency student mental health activities, but the federal grant ends in 2023. The Legislature should appropriate funds and provide direction to TEA to establish an office staffed with at least 4.0 permanent FTEs to support agency activities related to: student mental health; assisting districts in addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral concerns and trauma among students stemming from the COVID-19; and provisions within SB 11 and HB 18 related to mental health promotion and intervention, substance abuse prevention and intervention, suicide prevention, and multi-tiered safe and supportive school programs.

3. **Increase the capacity of ESCs to assist districts in implementing effective school mental health practices.** Fund ESCs to provide technical assistance to districts in using multi-tiered systems of support aimed at preventing and/or mitigating the negative effects of trauma, mental health and substance use/misuse concerns on student learning. Having ESC professionals available to provide districts with technical assistance services to prevent and mitigate the negative effects of mental health concerns on student learning would complement the “recognize and refer” services offered by NPMHP’s established by HB 19.
4. **Dedicate a portion of the Safe and Supportive School Allotment to support mental health strategies.** Continue to fund the Safe and Supportive School Allotment, including a requirement that districts use a portion of the allotment on strategies that support supportive school climates and student mental health. School districts need consistent levels of funding for mental health related services and supports.
5. **Establish a school mental health matching grant program.** Establish a matching grant program in which districts can apply to TEA for funding to support the development and implementation of comprehensive plans that address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students grounded in research-based practices. Priority should be given to non-metro districts located in under-resourced communities and provide enhanced training, technical assistance, coaching, and evaluation services.
6. **Increase access to school-based mental health services.** Coordinate with the Article II Subcommittee to increase access among school districts to partner with community-based providers to provide on-site, telehealth, and/or community-based mental health services to students.

7. **Establish a state center for enhanced technical assistance on school mental health.** Provide TEA with funding and direction to request proposals for the establishment of a Center of Excellence in Texas that can provide school districts and ESCs with enhanced training, technical assistance, coaching on research-based practices related to areas identified in Education Code Sec. 38.351.



TEXAS COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

1210 San Antonio, Ste. 200 • Austin, Texas 78701
Phone: (512) 472-3403 OR (800) 580-8144 • Fax: (512) 472-3756

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Submitted by Jan Friese, Executive Director, jan@txca.org; 512-472-3403 ext. 11

The Texas Counseling Association represents more than 6,500 professional counselors working in an array of settings across Texas. We appreciate the opportunity to provide recommendations to the Article III Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

1. Increase funding for the [Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals](#). The purpose of the Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals is to encourage qualified mental health professionals to practice in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (MHPSA) and provide mental health care services to recipients under the medical assistance program authorized by the Texas Human Resources Code, Chapter 32, and to enrollees under the child health plan program authorized by the Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 62.

Data from the Coordinating Board shows that about 230 mental health professionals in Texas are currently participating in this program. At current funding levels of \$2.7 million for the biennium coupled with a \$750,000 annual federal match, the Coordinating Board is only able to provide loan repayment assistance to recipients already enrolled in the program. They have not been able to add new recipients for some time.

Texas ranks second in the nation for the highest number of Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. Continuing and expanding this program is one way to strengthen the mental health workforce in Texas and encourage mental health professionals to work in shortage areas and correctional facilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for access to mental health services. We encourage you to prioritize funding of this important program.

2. Appropriate \$1 million to establish a **Loan Repayment Program for School Counselors** working in Title 1 schools or in communities designated as Mental Health Workforce Shortage Areas. Legislation for such a program was incorporated into SB 11, although it was removed in conference committee. Loan repayment assistance for teachers and other mental health professionals has proven to be an effective strategy to attract and retain essential professionals in those communities that need them most. Research documents that on campuses with school counselors who implement comprehensive school counseling programs, students and teachers report they feel safer, disciplinary referrals drop, grades improve, graduation rates rise and students are more likely to pursue postsecondary opportunities. Modeled after the Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals, a school counselor loan repayment program will help ensure that children in communities with the least resources would benefit from have a school counselor available to help them.

3. Reinstate funding for the **School Counselor Grant Program** set forth in Section 33.002 of the Texas Education Code. This program was housed at the Texas Education Agency to provide matching state funds to help school districts hire additional elementary school counselors.

Although TEA reports the average student to school counselor ratio in Texas is 469:1, in actuality, the student to school counselor ratios is much, much higher in many school districts, especially those in mental health workforce shortage areas and those that receive Title I allocations.

Research documents that when young students who have experienced trauma, disaster, abuse or other Adverse Childhood Experiences receive services, their ability to recover and become successful is greatly enhanced. In addition, on campuses with school counselors who implement comprehensive school counseling programs, students and teachers report they feel safer, disciplinary referrals drop, grades improve, graduation rates rise and students are more likely to pursue postsecondary opportunities. Dedicating funds specifically for this program will ensure that districts will use state dollars to hire school counselors, rather than redirecting those funds to other less effective initiatives.



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September 20, 2020

To: Appropriations Committees - S/C on Articles III, VI, VII & VIII

From: Texas Farm Bureau

Re: Interim Charge 1

Thank you for the opportunity to present comments on Interim Charge 1 regarding appropriation riders passed by the 86th Legislature.

Texas Farm Bureau opposes rider Number 8 of the Texas A&M AgriLife (AgriLife) budget, and rider Number 26 of Texas Department of Agriculture's (TDA) budget. These riders prevent AgriLife from researching the use of the toxicant warfarin to control feral hogs and the implementation of the use of the toxicant warfarin on feral hogs by TDA. We have included the rider language at the end of this document.

Feral hogs are a common predator among the very diverse ecological regions of Texas. They are prevalent in all Texas counties. Farmers, ranchers, landowners and homeowners have had major difficulties in curtailing feral hog populations and the damages they leave behind. Despite the best efforts put forth – Texas has failed to stop feral hogs for many decades.

The use of firearms, traps, aircraft and state sponsored events and programs are helpful but terminate just a very small portion of the population that rapidly grows each year. Our landowner members cannot continue this fight with only these current, methods and tools. More tools are necessary to actually help eradicate feral hogs.

In 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved the use a warfarin-based toxicant product for feral hogs. The active ingredient is also found in numerous other formulations that have been successfully used to control pest populations for many decades across the United States.

Texans are familiar with warfarin-based toxicants for rodents like mice and rats. These baits can be easily purchased at a grocery store. Additional warfarin products are available to control gophers, moles and prairie dogs on yards, pastures and rangelands, but they require applicator training and certification that is administered by TDA. A feral hog toxicant would have similar requirements, but these appropriations riders prevent all opportunity, including certification requirements, to put the product to use.

The safe use of all pesticides is a priority. The EPA is charged with protecting human health and the environment, and their experts deemed this feral hog toxicant safe for use as a category IV pesticide. This classifies it with lower risk than many common rodenticides and the mandatory safety label does not require signals words for applicators such as "CAUTION" in bold text.

The trade name of the available product is "Kaput Feral Hog Bait" and it has been in development since the early 2000's. Research in laboratories, feral hog pens and field settings have been completed and were utilized by the EPA in their approval evaluation. Since 2017, universities have performed additional studies to investigate personal safety through identification of baited hogs by the blue dye marker in the bait as well as monitoring pigs for signs of pain prior to death. The results confirmed that EPA approved a safe, humane and effective toxicant bait.

This invasive species has garnered federal attention. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) identifies feral hogs as a major threat and has been working on control and eradication efforts for years.

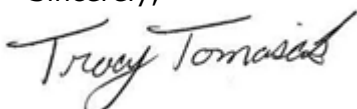
The 2018 Farm Bill designated \$75 million to fund research and pilot projects for feral hog control, and Texas already started three. A toxicant will be another tool used in the work to control feral hogs, but Texas research partners are not able to consider any warfarin toxicant in their trials due to the effects of these appropriations riders.

The state needs access to more feral hog control tools. We will see more agricultural losses and greater damages to the natural resources of Texas if we continue to prevent research and use of the available warfarin toxicant to protect our farms, ranches, crops and livestock from predation by feral hogs.

TFB members are steadfast in supporting ways to maintain clean water, food and fiber production, high quality of life and health for ourselves, neighbors and of our lands. However, the growing feral hog population hinders all of these best practices.

We urge you to remove these riders and allow these agencies to become assets in researching and implementation of warfarin-based products to control feral hogs.

Sincerely,



Tracy Tomascik
Associate Director
Commodity & Regulatory Activities

Rider Language:

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE RESEARCH, ARTICLE III - page 241

8. Appropriation Restriction on Feral Hog Abatement Using Toxic Substances. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, none of the funds appropriated to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in this Act may be used for the implementation of warfarin on feral hogs

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ARTICLE VI – page 10

26. Appropriation Restriction on Feral Hog Abatement Using Toxic Substances. None of the funds appropriated to the Department of Agriculture in this Act may be used for the implementation of warfarin on feral hogs.

Graduate Medical Education

The pandemic has placed demands on physicians at levels never seen before. Patient needs have varied and encompassed medical specialties across the state. Frontline physicians are needed to treat patients who are hospitalized with COVID-19, pediatricians to treat children in their offices for childhood illnesses and to provide preventive care, and specialists like pathologists and radiologists to work behind the scenes to diagnose patient illnesses. Each physician has a life-saving and healing role in meeting the medical needs of Texans.

Before the pandemic, Texas ranked 41st in the overall state ranking of physicians per capita, and 47th for primary care physicians. Texas can ill afford a reduction in its physician supply.

Having an adequate number of graduate medical education (GME) positions is fundamental in preparing physicians needed for Texas. The state's medical schools are doing their part to educate more physicians. If there are not enough GME positions to train graduates in a medical specialty, those physicians can be expected to leave the state for training elsewhere, and many who leave will not return to practice in the state. When they leave, they take the state's \$183,000 investment, provided through formula funding, along with them. Texas has a policy that supports a **ratio of 1.1 entry-level training positions for each Texas medical school graduate**. Looking to the near future, **Texas needs to add 58 first-year GME positions in 2024 and 43 more in 2025** to maintain the ratio of 1.1 to 1. This will align GME with the increased number of medical school graduates expected for those years from the new medical schools in Texas. Without this growth, the ratio will drop below 1.1 to 1 in 2024 and 2025, as shown in the graph, and Texas will lose the recent gains in GME capacity. Given the financial challenges faced by hospitals during the pandemic, there are serious concerns hospitals may have no choice but to quit funding GME programs. It is absolutely necessary for the state to continue its support of GME.

TMA's Legislative Recommendation

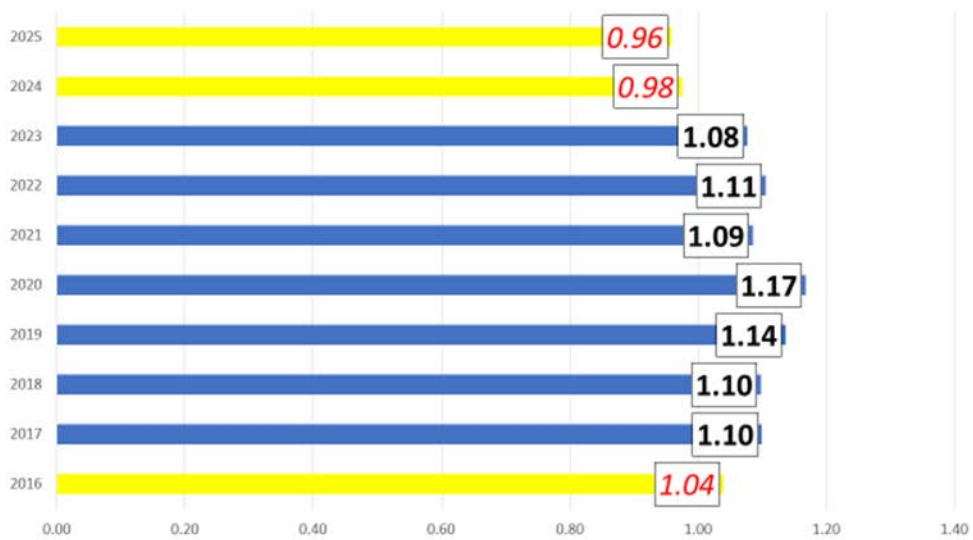
Continue state support for the following critically important GME capacity-building and -sustaining programs:

- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board budget: Graduate Medical Education Expansion Program, State Rural Training Track Grant Program, and Family Medicine Residency Program
- Health-related institution bill patterns budget: formula funding for GME teaching costs

TMA's Messages

- Texas leads the nation in population growth. Physician demand is now at unprecedented levels, and Texas needs more physicians to respond to this need.
- Texas must grow its GME capacity to retain medical graduates in the state for training and ultimately for entrance into medical practice.
- Good health is dependent on access to medical care.

Q: Will Texas Maintain State GME Goal of 1.1 to 1 in Near Future?
A: Only if More GME Positions are Added
If no positions are added after 2020, future ratios would decline, as shown below



This comment pertains to Appropriations Article 3. My name is Linda Litzinger, Public Policy Specialist representing Texas Parent to Parent, a statewide non-profit serving children and adults with disability.

We wish to discuss the topic of SHARS billing, which is federal funding that passes through HHSC so that TMHP can reimburse schools for personal attendants and other medical services. The issue is that billing companies are approaching schools to do their billing for them, not for a flat rate, but for a percentage of what they recoup. When TMHP reimburses a school, the money can be spent on anything; it doesn't have to be returned to the special education budget. There is a lot of creativity in order to use these federal funds.

The issue is that the billing must first go to private insurance, and sometimes private insurers don't realize that the DME or labor occurred in schools, so the private insurer pays the bill and the fragile child thus moves closer to their private insurance cap. In some company plans, the insurer doesn't provide notice as they pay, so the family (who may be approaching the cap) remains clueless.

We have families who have identified that billing was for DME equipment that wasn't even used on their student. Also we have students who were billed for full time service of a paraprofessional, yet they do not have one in any course. All of these costs may end up being paid by an insurance plan where the child received none of what was on the bill, yet the family has no knowledge. We recommend that 1) Billing companies move to a flat rate for their services. 2) Schools be limited to using all reimbursements for special education services.

Thank you for your time with this matter.



Dear Chair Bonnen and Appropriations Committee Members,

My name is Aurora Harris, Southern Regional Director for Young Invincibles (YI). YI is a national, non-partisan research and advocacy organization focused on economic advancement for young people ages 18 to 34, including access to affordable higher education. In Texas, we are based in Houston and Austin. We work with young people throughout the state and share in their struggles and successes on the path to financial security. During the last year we conducted extensive research on Texas student loan debt, the rising cost of college, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on postsecondary students and young adults during the transition into hybrid and virtual learning. As students navigate virtual coursework, it is critical they can access resources vital to their academic success, including textbooks that pose no additional cost for those experiencing financial hardship. We are honored to present to you our research and recommendations regarding the 86th Legislative Session's appropriations of state repository of OER and for additional grants—awarded through Senate Bill 810's Open Educational Resources Grant Program of the 85th Legislative Session.

Skilled Workforce Demand

Resources that assist in postsecondary degree completion, such as textbooks, are both a higher education and workforce issue. As industries shift to high-tech environments, the demand for a more knowledgeable workforce is apparent. 65% of jobs will require a post-secondary degree, while under 25% of Texans meet projected workforce needs.¹ Now, high school diplomas are no longer viewed as a sufficient knowledge background for today's workplace. Rather, there has been a push for a workforce that has postsecondary education that equips potential workers with the knowledge and tools needed to succeed in fast-paced, high-tech environments. "According to the Center on Education and the Workforce, more than 95 percent of jobs created during the [2008 Great Recession] economic recovery have gone to workers with at least some college education, while those with a high school diploma or less have not seen a return of their jobs. As a result, workers with at least some postsecondary education now make up 65 percent of the total employment, and bachelor's degree holders now earn 57 percent of all wages."² In summary, skilled workers have higher chances of obtaining a job.

¹ Georgetown Center on Education and Houston Endowment, as cited by Texas 2036. <https://texas2036.org>

²U.S. Department of Education. Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Key

Additionally, data shows that “having a college degree makes a person more than three times as likely to rise from the bottom of the family income ladder all the way to the top, and makes a person more than four times as likely to rise from the bottom of the family wealth (determined by cumulative assets such as home ownership) ladder to the top.”³ Pursuing a postsecondary education is not only an expectation in today’s competitive job market, but also the most direct way of building generational wealth. However, any form of postsecondary education requires two essential resources: time and money. As such, **Open Educational Resources** are critical to lowering the costs of postsecondary education for students across fields and degrees, and impact students’ ability to graduate and enter the Texas workforce.

COVID-19 Digital Shift and Rising Cost of Education

In early 2020, students, educators, and higher education staff found themselves completely switching to online education. Along with this transition, students' assignments and any relevant classroom materials were also moved online. This digital shift has made it more difficult than ever to ensure students have the resources they need to succeed, particularly as students are experiencing changes to housing and employment. A recent survey of over 20,000 students conducted by Healthy Minds Network and American College Health Association, found that “financial stress, a known predictor of student mental health, has been significantly affected by the pandemic: two-thirds of students report their financial situation has become more stressful. Roughly one-third of students report that their living situation changed as a result of the pandemic.”⁴

While students and institutions navigate this large shift to virtual education, students must also grapple with the soaring cost of college. In fact, “from 2006 to 2016, according to the Consumer Price Index maintained by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost of attending college increased dramatically by 62.7 percent for higher education tuition, 88 percent for college textbooks, and 51 percent for school housing.”⁴ The cost of college is one of the many obstacles that students face in their pursuit of a postsecondary education. Underlying inequities disproportionately impact students, particularly those of color and low-income.

The repercussions of these inequities can have lifelong impacts in the lives of the students, their families, and communities. Research has shown that “gaps in college opportunity diminish social mobility and play a role in perpetuating intergenerational disparities by race and ethnicity, and also socioeconomic status.”² Alternatively, “young people from low-income

Data Highlights Focusing on Race and Ethnicity and Promising Practices. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016, www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf.

³U.S. Department of Education. Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Key Data Highlights Focusing on Race and Ethnicity and Promising Practices. Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2016, www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf.

⁴ The Healthy Minds Network, and American College Health Association. The Impact of COVID-19 on College Student Well-Being. 2020, healthymindsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Healthy_Minds_NCHA_COVID_Survey_Report_FINAL.pdf.

backgrounds who complete a bachelor's degree have income and employment characteristics after graduation equivalent to their peers from more affluent backgrounds.”⁵

The rising cost of education is accompanied by out-of-pocket/non-tuition expenses that trickle down to students and their parents/guardians. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that the “average non tuition costs at public 2-year institutions were \$12,400, which was lower than that at public 4-year institutions (\$15,100), private for profit institutions (\$15,000), and private nonprofit 4-year institutions (\$15,200).”⁶ These non tuition expenses include housing, food, child care, transportation, and other services that students need to be successful. **Textbooks remain one of these critical non tuition expenses, as they are essential to academic success and increasingly more expensive.**

Rising Textbook Costs and Open Educational Resources

The most direct way to alleviate some of the financial hardships experienced by students is by decreasing one of their highest out-of-pocket costs—textbooks. As previously noted, from 2006 to 2016, the cost of textbooks increased by 88 percent.⁴ This is not a new phenomenon, in fact “between December of 1986 and December of 2004, textbook prices have increased at twice the rate of inflation, increasing by 186 percent, whereas tuition and fees increased by 240 percent and overall price inflation grew by 72 percent (ibid.). Given the pandemic, it is also increasingly difficult for students to share textbooks with peers, which some students opt to do when cost is prohibitive.

Young Invincibles supports the increase in appropriations for OER as a cost effective measure. In 2018 alone, “over 2.2 million students [saved] an estimated \$177 million by using free textbooks from OpenStax.”⁷ This Rice University-based publisher provides open educational resource materials to students and educators.

In order to continue bolstering effectiveness of the OER, we recommend:

1. Increased communications to higher education institutions and students about coursework utilizing OER, such as incentives for increasing OER based coursework.
2. Continued expansion of the OER program, in order to increase the number of courses that can be completed using OER resources.
3. The creation of an Open Educational Resources council that could monitor the use and growth of OER funds across the state. For example, the council could collect and share best campus practices in administering OER resources. The council could furthermore

⁵ Eckel, Peter D., and Jacqueline E. King. An Overview of Higher Education in the United States: Diversity, Access, and the Role of the Marketplace. American Council on Education, 2004, www.acenet.edu/Documents/Overview-of-Higher-Education-in-the-United-States-Diversity-Access-and-the-Role-of-the-Marketplace-2004.pdf.

⁶ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020470.pdf>

⁷ <https://openstax.org/press/48-percent-colleges-22-million-students-using-free-openstax-textbooks-year>

bolster student leadership and representation on OER, and utilize student voice to understand the ways OER can be most effective for students today.

4. Growth of entire degree programs composed of OER.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Aurora Harris, Southern Regional Director, Young Invincibles

Christina Long, Southern Policy and Advocacy Manager, Young Invincibles

Josue Rodriguez, Texas Organizing Coordinator, Young Invincibles



Aurora Harris, Southern Regional Director
3300 N Interstate 35, Austin, TX 78705

Rio Gonzalez, Mental Health Policy Fellow
3300 N Interstate 35, Austin, TX 78705

Dear House Committee Members on Appropriations,

My name is Rio Gonzalez; I am the Mental Health Policy Fellow for Young Invincibles (YI) a national, non-partisan research and advocacy organization focused on critical economic issues facing young people ages 18 to 34, one of them being access to affordable health care. In Texas we are based in Houston and Austin, work with young people throughout the state, and share in their struggles and successes on the path to health access. During May 2020, we conducted our second annual health education symposium, HealthE. HealthE is a young adult led webinar series with discussion of critical topics such as health care resources, health disparities, mental health, and reproductive health care. Overall, 321 Texans, ranging from ages 18-40, attended the 4- day online symposium where Texas young adults were able to voice the challenges they face when accessing quality affordable health care. At the end of the letter is our HealthE one-pager on Mental Health. Thank you for the opportunity to submit our research findings and recommendations regarding Interim Charges #1.

Current Landscape

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Texas held the largest number and percentage of uninsured residents in the United States, with almost one third of young adults in Texas uninsured.¹ Additionally, Texas has yet to expand Medicaid; the strict eligibility requirements have created an enormous coverage gap for those who do not qualify for Medicaid or Marketplace premium tax credits.² The pandemic has further highlighted and exacerbated the significant challenges people who are uninsured or underinsured face. The pandemic-driven economic recession has led to a vast amount of job loss causing millions to lose their job-based coverage. Although loss of health coverage is a qualifying event for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP), the process of providing documentation eligibility has proven to be burdensome during the pandemic. In an attempt to alleviate some of the burden and extend coverage to people who are uninsured, most

¹ Matthew Buettgens, Linda J. Blumberg, and Clare Pan, "The Uninsured in Texas: Statewide and Local Area Views," Episcopal Health (Urban Institute, December 2018),

https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/99498/uninsured_in_texas_2.pdf.

² Rachel Garfield, Kendal Orgera, and Anthony Damico, "The Coverage Gap: Uninsured Poor Adults in States That Do Not Expand Medicaid," KFF (KFF, January 14, 2020),

<https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/the-coverage-gap-uninsured-poor-adults-in-states-that-do-not-expand-medi-caid/>.

of the state-based marketplaces, not including Texas, have offered SEPs with minimal eligibility restrictions. Because of these COVID-19 SEPs, at least 300,000 additional people have been able to enroll since March across eight states.³ Furthermore, thousands of young students have lost access to their campus providers, as colleges and universities throughout the U.S. went virtual in response to the pandemic. There is a huge concern for those who have lost access to their providers seeing as experts anticipate a colossal mental health wave brought on by the pandemic and experiences of racial trauma.

Interim Charge 1

Mental Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program

The Mental Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program was created in 2015 to help address the shortage in the mental health professions, an escalating public health emergency. Senate Bill 239, offers up to five years of student loan repayment assistance to five types of mental health professionals (advanced practice registered nurses, licensed clinical social workers, licensed professional counselors, psychiatrists, and psychologists) who work in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area (MHPSAs).⁴

The \$2.125 million appropriated for the program is meant to address the workforce shortage and improve access to mental health services by incentivizing mental health professionals to relocate to a MHPSA and help close the gap by providing mental health care services to Texans in underserved areas. Research shows that high percentages (76%) of Texans have a close loved one who has experienced a mental health need and nearly half of Texans experience a mental health challenge in their lifetime. Of Texas' 254 counties, 81% (207 counties) are designated as MHPSAs, and 94% (241 counties) have some level of shortage of mental health providers.

Compared to the national average of 129 psychologists per 100,000 residents, Texas has 76. The shortages are similar throughout the other 4 mental health professions and they worsen with specialists who serve disenfranchised communities.⁵

Without the right care, low-income people with the most severe and complex mental health needs can find themselves in cycles of super utilization of emergency rooms, hospitals, jails, and homeless shelters. Without an adequate number of the mental health providers, less than 1 in 12 Texans will be able to receive the care they need to break out of this cycle. Without a solution to this public health emergency, the local Texas government will continue to pay \$2.2 billion for

³ Emily Gee, Charles Gaba, and Nicole Rapfogel, "The ACA Marketplaces Are Poised To Weather COVID-19," Center for American Progress (Center for American Progress, August 21, 2020), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/healthcare/reports/2020/08/21/489710/aca-marketplaces-poised-weather-covid-19/>.

⁴ "Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals," Texas State of Mind (The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, April 2017), https://www.texasstateofmind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MMHPI_PolicyBrief_SB239_LoanRepaymentProgram_FINAL05022017.pdf.

⁵ Andy Keller, "We Must Address Texas' Behavioral Health Emergency," by PhD, President/CEO Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, TribTalk (TribTalk, May 13, 2015), <https://www.tribtalk.org/2015/05/13/behavioral-health-emergency/>.

the total cost of unmet mental health needs of Texans, with \$1.4 billion of the cost being from emergency room visits and \$700 million coming from the local justice system.⁶

Although the Mental Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program is not perfect, it is a step in the right direction to ending the mental health workforce shortage and increasing mental health care access to Texans throughout the state. Currently, there is a high level of interest in the program and not enough funds to enroll new participants for the 2020-2021 fiscal year.⁷ It is vital to protect this program.

Mental Health Workforce Training Programs

Evidence shows that there are benefits in investing limited resources into counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists. Yet over the past decade, many schools, colleges, and universities have invested limited resources into increasing police on campuses as a method to improve safety. However, there is no evidence that having police on campus improves safety.⁸ There is evidence that police on campus can lead to harm, especially to vulnerable students with low-income and racially diverse backgrounds. This increase in police creates a direct funnel into the school-to-prison pipeline for these vulnerable students who are being looked at as criminals and not scholars. Nationally, in public education, Black girls are 4 times more likely to be arrested in school than white girls; in Texas, Black girls are 5 times more likely to be arrested in school than white girls.⁹

Mental health supports on campus are critical to student wellbeing and safety. Campuses with mental health providers show an improvement in attendance rates, better academic achievement, and higher graduation rates, as well as overall improvement in safety.¹⁰ Despite the known benefits of having mental health resources in the education system, there are 14 million K-12 students who attend a school with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker. Additionally, most states are understaffed and do not meet the recommended student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1; in Texas, the ratio is 434:1.¹¹ For colleges and universities, the recommended staff-to-student ratio is different from that of schools. It is recommended that they have one professional staff member for every 1,000 to 1,500 students. However, the national average ratio of mental health professionals to students is 1 to 1,600.¹² Out of six Texas universities whose staff-to-student ratio were observed, all six universities were well-above the recommended ratio with UT-Austin having the best ratio of one staff member for every 1,818 students. The University of Houston had the worst ratio of one staff member for every 3,285

⁶“The Local Burden of Unmet Mental Health Needs on Texas Counties,” Texas State of Mind (The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute), accessed September 29, 2020, https://www.texasstateofmind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/TexasCUC_UnmetNeeds_Handout_FINAL-43464.pdf.

⁷“Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals,” HHLoans (THECB, 2020), <http://www.hhloans.com/index.cfm?objectid=EC6C1C10-8982-11E5-A0840050560100A9>.

⁸ “Cops and No Counselors,” American Civil Liberties Union (American Civil Liberties Union), accessed September 30, 2020, <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/cops-and-no-counselors>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Statement Regarding Recommended Staff To Student Ratios,” 2019, <https://iacsinc.org/staff-to-student-ratios/>.

students.¹³ Larger educational institutions tend to have higher ratios than smaller educational institutions. These higher ratios have led to an increase in wait times to see a mental health provider, making it extremely difficult for students experiencing severe challenges to get the help they need. Texas should take the lead in investing more on mental health resources available to students.¹⁴

Recommendations

Replace the “30% rule”

In order to improve the Mental Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program, we recommend replacing the “30% rule” with a rule that allows for more leniency in funding more mental health professionals based on eligible applications received each round. For example, for the first round of applications in 2016, only \$1,162,283 million of the \$2.13 million funds available were used because of the 30% rule, which says only 30% of the awards could be made to any one profession. This rule should become more lenient so that all the funds from the program can be used to its fullest potential, especially when there are application rounds with fewer psychiatrists applications and more licensed professional counselors applications.¹⁵ Furthermore, we recommend promoting this program to mental health professionals who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in order to help diversify the workforce, and that all participants in the program receive trauma responsive training to help all Texans cope with the trauma brought on by the pandemic and experiences of racial trauma.

Expand Medicaid

Additionally, we recommend that in order to get more young adults in Texas insured, Texas expands Medicaid coverage and offers a Special Enrollment Period with broad eligibility for the uninsured. We recommend increasing access to telemedicine and telehealth services to help alleviate some of the burden highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic. It’s never been more important for every young adult to access health insurance.

Invest in Postsecondary Mental Health Providers

We recommend increasing funding for mental health staffing so that schools, colleges, and universities can meet the recommended staff-to-student ratio.

Sincerely,

Aurora Harris, Southern Regional Director
Rio Gonzalez, Mental Health Policy Fellow
Christina Long, Southern Policy and Advocacy Manager
Young Invincibles

¹³ Aneri Pattani, “Texas Colleges Lag in Mental Health Services,” The Texas Tribune (The Texas Tribune, August 9, 2016), <https://www.texastribune.org/2016/08/09/texas-universities-struggle-fund-mental-health-ser/>.

¹⁴ “Statement Regarding Recommended Staff To Student Ratios,” 2019, <https://iacsinc.org/staff-to-student-ratios/>.

¹⁵ “Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals,” Texas State of Mind (The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute , April 2017), https://www.texasstateofmind.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MMHPI_PolicyBrief_SB239_LoanRepaymentProgram_FINAL05022017.pdf.

Well At Home synopsis:

Background: The Well At Home session focused on young adult mental health in Texas. Almost 1 in 5 adults will experience a mental health challenge at some time in their life,¹ and about 10.3% of US adults with mental illness have no insurance coverage.² Despite many colleges and universities offering counseling services for full-time students, additional mental health resources on college campuses is a pressing need for many. In addition to educating young adults on mental illness and mental health resources, this session was formulated to give young people tools to cope with stress and anxiety.

Session Description: The Well At Home HealthE 2.0 session was led by advocates Wendy Martinez, Olivia Garcia, and Imad Farooque. This session aimed to define mental health, and explore the various ways mental health challenges show up in young people, particularly during the Coronavirus pandemic. After an interactive icebreaker, the advocates led an educational section on mental health and Houston-area mental health resources, before ending with a guided meditation from guest speaker, Ellie Rome.

What we heard:

An enormous desire for more affordable mental health care: “I wish mental health care was more affordable. There have been big leaps in its destigmatization, but marginal ones in its affordability. Psychiatrists and counselors often around at least \$40/hour.”

Feelings of isolation and increased mental health strains during quarantine: “[COVID-19] has made me more stressed out than usual and I feel like I’m not around my friends so the normal ways that I would cope with that stress are not available to me.” COVID-19 was noted as the main stressor in survey takers’ lives.

A need for mental health education: 32.41% of the 29 total players from the Well At Home session answered the mental health-focused questions correctly, showing a need for more mental health education. Only 17.24% of players guessed that 1 in 10 young people experience depression. Clearly there is an important need for increased mental health education.

1 <https://www.nami.org/nami-media/nami-media/infographics/generalmhfacts.pdf>
2 <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/mental-health-america-access-care-data>



Policy recommendations:



Future legislation should incorporate more sliding-scale mental health services in the Texas area in order to address issues of **affordability and accessibility**. Texas should incentivize the inclusion of mental health treatment in value-based care plans.



Texas should incentivize colleges and universities to **increase the number** of licensed mental health professionals on staff. Campuses in the state should be required to provide biannual mental health counseling to all students.

September 30, 2020

To: Committee on House Appropriations, Subcommittee on Article III

RE: Interim Charge 1

Chairman Bonnen, Vice Chair Walle and Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit information in response to the House Interim Charges.

Interim Charge 1: Monitor the agencies and programs under Article III and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation and riders passed by the 86th Legislature.

I. About Teach For America

Teach For America works in partnership with communities to expand educational opportunity for children facing the challenges of poverty. Our focus is on finding, developing and supporting exceptional and diverse leaders, individually and in teams, so they can transform education and expand opportunity for children, starting in the classroom.

Our first regions in Texas, Houston and the Rio Grande Valley, were founded in 1991; in 2009 we launched in Dallas and expanded into Fort Worth in 2010. Additionally, in 2010 we also launched in San Antonio. In the summer of 2019, TFA hired a full-time director to lead our efforts in Austin, which has a network approaching 900 alumni of our organization. In 2019 - 2020, the Teach For America network in Texas approached 4,750 members.

The General Appropriations Act of the 86th Legislature appropriates \$11M in funding to Teach For America in support of our efforts in Texas, outlined in Rider 47.

II. Organizational Shifts in Response to COVID-19

Cost Savings and Budget Reductions

For the 2019-2020FY, Teach For America – Texas realized over \$3M in cost savings (14%) through reductions in travel and the move from an in-person summer training to a virtual format. Our current plan for the 2020-2021FY projects 10% cost savings as compared to our initial plans for the year prior.

Support from the State of Texas is a critical piece of our overall funding strategy, which allows us to **leverage other sources of funding 3:1 over the past two years.**

Sources of Funds	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021*
State of Texas	\$5,500,000	\$5,500,000	\$4,950,000
Other Sources (Foundation, Corporation, Individual, District, Federal)	\$16,335,679	\$15,710,851	\$13,851,669
Total Fundraising	\$21,835,679	\$21,210,851	\$18,801,699
*projected funding			

We are currently planning on a **5% (\$550,000) cut to our state funding** for the remainder of the biennium (2020-2021). As a function of our recruitment costs alone, this cut represents the costs of recruiting, evaluating and selecting **55 new TFA teachers for the 2021 cohort**. As a function of our costs to support the ongoing professional development and student-focused coaching, this cut represents our costs for **services to 60 in-service TFA teachers in the 2020-2021 school year**.

Virtual Summer Teacher Training

With the safety and well-being of TFA corps members and staff as our priority, we transitioned the 2020 Institute to a Virtual Summer Teacher Training (VSTT). As we always have in the last 30 years, we're working to meet this moment for our students, families, and communities and ensure that our corps members are prepared to teach in the fall, whether it's at the front of a classroom or in a virtual setting. From June 11 through July 10, our full network of incoming corps members participated in a virtual summer program where they developed a vision for student learning, an understanding of trauma-informed practices and what it takes to create inclusive environments – and they did it together, across 2500 schools in 350 communities, across content areas, and across lines of difference.

- Summer programming was anchored in four domains:



- Teach For America partnered with [The Teaching Channel](#) as our technology platform and [Springboard Collaborative](#) to allow for direct work with students and families to improve early reading skills and literacy; and
- TFA corps members will receive an ongoing continuum of support throughout their first years in the classroom, including rapid feedback cycles, continued teacher development, and access to a curated set of high-quality curriculum options and instructional materials, and resources.

Network Needs Analysis

TFA is acutely aware that COVID-19 has deeply impacted students and their communities in profound ways. To empower and prepare our corps members, alumni, and staff to meet these challenges, both present and long-term, we have mapped a Network & [Student Needs Assessment](#). This resource provides insights and direction as the TFA network tackles the basic, emotional, educational and technological needs of students across our Texas regions. This information will be a foundational guide for our work over the next six months and beyond.

School Partner Demand

While the uncertainties of beginning to teach during the pandemic are significant, our incoming teachers are committed to the work ahead. Our total incoming cohort for the summer of 2020 is over 330, slightly up from 325 in 2019. This has allowed us to meet the significant demand for talent among our partner districts. As the pandemic continues to impact the teacher workforce, with the additional uncertainty of even greater return to in-person instruction, Teach For America is already at work recruiting our 2021 cohort; our first application deadline was September 4, 2020.

III. Current Scale & Impact in Texas

With 29 years of impact in Texas, we've built a network of over 4,600 leaders in Texas: 1,900 classroom teachers, over 350 campus principals and assistant principals, over 375 district leaders and administrators, 11 elected officials and numerous policy leaders. Our current scale has been fueled significantly by an investment from the State of Texas since the 2009 legislative session under the Texas Education Agency strategy of Educator Leadership & Quality.

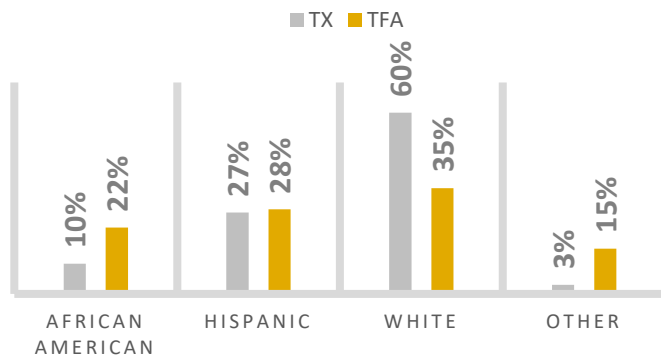
10 Years of Growth	2008-2009	2019-2020	Growth
TFA Regions	2	5	↑ 250%
TFA Teachers	832	1,900	↑ 228%
Annual Student Impact	53,248	121,600	↑ 228%
TFA School Leaders	25	360	↑ 1440%
TFA Central Office Leaders	30	335	↑ 1117%
TFA School System Leaders	7	45	↑ 643%
Total TFA K-12 Leaders	894	2,640	↑ 433%
Non K-12 TFA Members	476	2,063	↑ 433%

In 2019-2020, TFA had 619 first- and second-year teachers ("corps members") in 279 campuses in 24 district and charters in Houston, the Rio Grande Valley, Dallas – Fort Worth and San Antonio, reaching over 39,500 students. Forty percent of these teachers were in secondary math or science placements; ten percent were in bilingual or ESL placements.

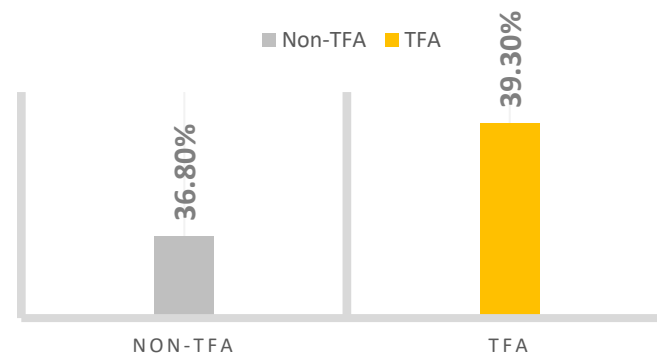
In four key areas, Teach For America is delivering results for the State of Texas: teacher diversity, student achievement, teacher retention and school performance¹.

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/tfatx-HACartIII>

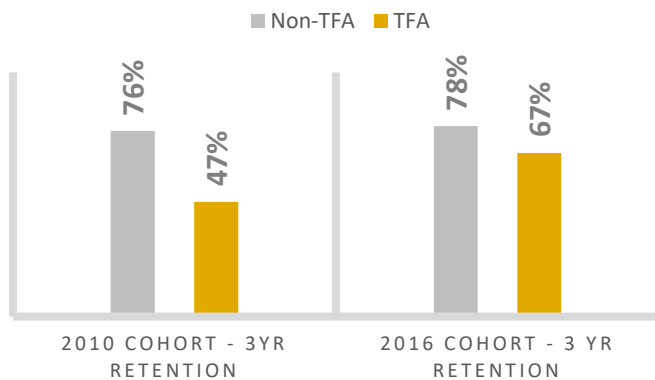
TFA TEACHERS ARE MORE DIVERSE THAN TX TEACHERS*



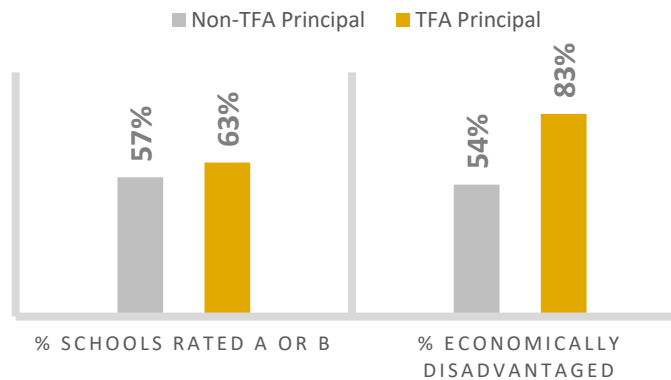
TFA STUDENTS MORE LIKELY TO MEET STANDARD ON STAAR*



TFA TEACHERS REMAIN AT INCREASING RATES*



TFA LED SCHOOLS ACHIEVE WITH HIGH-NEED STUDENTS*



IV. Highlights of Network Impact

As our state and school systems responded to the impacts and disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the Teach For America network have responded individually and collectively to meet the needs of students and families across our state. Here are a few examples of our network's actions:

- Jose Becerra (Rio Grande Valley corps 2016) has scaled up a [YouTube channel](#) that he initially developed to support students who were absent in his Pre-Calculus class;
- Lara Speights (Rio Grande Valley corps 2010) writes in a [LinkedIn Essay](#) about supporting students with diverse learning needs as a Literacy & Dyslexia Specialist;
- Taylor Toynes (Dallas corps 2014) founder and Executive Director of [For Oak Cliff](#) sent this message to his South Dallas Community of staff and partners;
- Colin Dempsey (Houston corps 2011) leads Comp-U-Dot in Houston, who have supplied [laptop computers to high need students and families](#) to support their distance learning;
- The national Teach For America network has sprung into action, including highlighting [resources for educators](#) and the work of [school leaders and principals in response to COVID-19](#);
- Shiroy Aspaniar (Houston corps 2010) co-founded [Ladder](#), a free, interactive portal that helps people understand their unemployment benefits and provide guidance on the CARES Act;
- Daniel Garrison (Dallas corps 2010), engineering and robotics teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School, is empowering his students to apply their knowledge by [printing 3D medical face shields](#) from home to help healthcare workers. These students are using their engineering knowledge to provide real world solutions;
- Our Austin Executive Director Christine Nishimura (Los Angeles corps 2006) hosted a [virtual forum](#) with staff from UT-Austin's Institute of Urban Policy and Research Analysis on the impact of the digital divide on Texas students.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to submit this information; we welcome any questions from the Committee.

My best,



Robert Carreon
Vice President, Public Affairs, Texas
Teach For America